

# The Moral Libertarian Manifesto

Taken from The Moral Libertarian Horizon, Volume 2

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## Preamble

A ghost is hanging over the West: the ghost of liberalism. The ghost of only partly fulfilled yet already abandoned promises of life and liberty, of equality and fraternity. Liberalism is not quite dead yet, but nor is it truly alive. It can only watch hopelessly as far-right and alt-right white nationalist elements duel it out with far-left neo-Marxist tendencies, with liberty being the biggest loser of each and every battle. The right had made 'liberal' a dirty word for four decades, and now a new generation of the left is about to do the same, the two long-time enemies burying liberalism in a rare bipartisanship.

Is it too late for liberalism? No, not really. But to return to life, it will need a life force. Life force comes from conviction, from moral principles, and from confidence. Only the moral libertarian idea, with its grounding in the one simple principle of morality that has been the unspoken core of liberal thought in history, will be able to resuscitate liberalism and return it to its previous vitality. Moral libertarians seek to clearly spell out their principle of Equality of Moral Agency (EMA), and vigorously apply it and defend it in the free market of ideas.

The rest of this manifesto is structured similarly to Karl Marx's famous Communist Manifesto of 1848, not because we are Marxists, but because it is a familiar format, and the historic spread of Marxism is testament to the effectiveness of this format. We hope that the Moral Libertarian idea will spread far and wide. (We have however decided to make it shorter, because two centuries on people like reading long texts much less.)

## 1. What is the Moral Libertarian Idea

Liberalism is an idea with a history stemming from the Western Enlightenment. The old world of master and slave was being swept away. In its place, a long line of thinkers from John Locke onwards theorised about how we can have a structure of liberty and equality instead. Since then, much has been achieved, but as we all know, the project is still incomplete. Furthermore, since the early 20th century, the rise of new forms of collectivism have repeatedly threatened to put liberal ideas in the dustbin of history. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, many thought that the end of liberalism was inevitable, with fascism and communism being the only two choices in the future. Many fascists proudly claimed that individualism was for the 19th century; that the 20th century would be the century of collectivism. But liberty proved more resilient, and re-asserted itself in the post-war world, while fascism was largely discredited and buried once its immorality was exposed.

More than half a century on, liberalism is again facing a crisis, and various forms of authoritarian collectivism are again promising utopias of various kinds. Liberalism is not as popular anymore, in a world where the dichotomy is increasingly left vs right, socialist vs capitalist, 'anti-fascist' vs 'alt-right', etc.

But it would be too soon to declare the irrelevance of liberalism once again. Why? Liberalism is the most moral ideology, and ideologies that are immoral at their core will sooner or later be discredited, like the fascism of the interwar period. Liberalism will be left standing the victor, like in the post-war period, as long as it has not been completely killed by its authoritarian opponents. Therefore, our mission is to give liberal ideals as much life force as possible. Such life force can only come with idealism, moral conviction and clear principles. We believe that the one core liberal idea is the Equality of Moral Agency (EMA), i.e. each and every individual should have equal ability to live and act out their sincerely held vision of morality, and no outside force, no matter if it is an individual despotic ruler or the tyranny of collectivist pressure, should be able to diminish any part of this. This is in fact the only morally valid structure for society, because as inherently flawed human beings, none of us are morally correct all the time. Therefore, to be able to force another to abide by one's moral values will inevitably mean forcing another to act in a way that is immoral at least some of the time. To allow this would effectively be to allow the conditions that caused the Holocaust, where thousands of people enabled the Holocaust to happen just because they were not allowed to oppose the will of Hitler. In other words, other ideologies are too similar to fascism, from a moral libertarian point of view.

Moral Libertarians argue for and uphold the principle of Equal Moral Agency at all times, on all issues, during all debates. We are well aware that we not only do not yet have equality of moral agency as things stand, the work to create a structure of equal moral agency will likely take generations to come. Each year, each decade, each generation, we strive to make things closer to the equality of moral agency, by insisting this principle be the core consideration for any policy of reform, and to encourage reform wherever we find that things are inconsistent with this principle. Bit by bit, we will be able to create a structure providing effective equality of moral agency for all. We are inherently reformist, because revolutions require there to be a strong leadership group, making this option against the equality of moral agency in principle. Furthermore, history has shown that once the leadership group is entrenched in power, it does not easily give up its extra moral agency (nor is it able to anyway). On the other hand, slow and steady wins the race.

Consistent with our core principle, Moral libertarians will strictly uphold the freedom of speech and freedom of conscience for all, and the freedom of religious belief for all. We will also strongly support reforms that remove state-sanctioned inequality of moral agency, for example marriage laws which privilege opposite-sex marriage above same-sex marriage. We will argue for the equal respect of individuals regardless of their characteristics or their political beliefs, left, right or center. We will also argue, on the same grounds, for the equal respect and treatment of all individuals, regardless of ethnic background, gender and gender identity, sexuality, and disability status. We strongly oppose on principle all discriminatory treatment, whether justified from 'conservative' grounds of tradition, or 'progressive' grounds of historical debt or disadvantage.

## 2. Answering Criticisms of Moral Libertarianism

Does Moral Libertarianism harm traditions and traditional morality? No, it doesn't, simply. Moral libertarians oppose the top-down maintenance of tradition by those in power, but people are free to live by, embrace and promote traditional points of view. In fact, our staunch opposition to top-down enforcement will, especially in the longer run, prove to be the greatest protector of traditional values.

Does Moral Libertarianism fail to protect minorities and excuse bigoted behaviour? No, we staunchly argue against discrimination, and are the only political faction which does so consistently. While we cannot support reducing freedom of speech, we do not believe this to be detrimental to minorities, because only open discussion will be effective in changing attitudes. Furthermore, moral libertarians uphold John Rawls' famous Veil of Ignorance in all our decision making, and thus are politically race-blind, gender-blind and sexuality-blind, while aiming to create systems that work for every single individual equally. Many of us support anti-discriminatory legislation in employment, for example, because we believe in society needing to be group-blind, as individualists.

Does Moral Libertarianism, with its encouragement of individualism, encourage selfishness and discourage communitarian thinking? Moral libertarians are opposed to the tyranny of the majority and strongly encourage individualist thinking. However, once individuals have their freedom to think and act, there is nothing preventing them from deciding to act for the benefit of the community. However, each individual will have their own right to determine what they believe is the greater good, rather than have a specific kind of greater good dictated to them by other people.

Does Moral Libertarianism neglect economic equality, especially historical economic equality? Moral libertarianism is not attached to any economic doctrine, and supports the democratic determination of economic policy, consistent with our support for democratic means of determination for every political issue that is unavoidably collective. In other words, every voter in the country should have a say. This way, we can have an economic policy that will serve the economic liberty of a broad range of people. The fact that, when the people have spoken they do not choose a certain economic policy (libertarian, Marxist, or anything in between) doesn't mean that there is anything wrong. It's democracy in action.

## 3. Relationship to Other Liberal Movements

Moral Libertarians explicitly state the assumption that underlies all other liberal movements, thus its worldviews and aims do not differ from any other liberal movement, at the core. The main difference is that we explicitly proclaim and live by the principle of Equal Moral Agency (EMA). Therefore, we avoid being liberal in technicality but being illiberal in practice. Left-liberals sometimes fail to challenge their further-left allies' encroachment on freedom of speech, while thin libertarians sometimes fail to challenge those who claim to be libertarian but are really Neoreaction-

style authoritarian conservatives at the core, for example. By upholding the EMA, our liberalism is made stronger.

Where other liberal movements, including classical liberals, social liberals, cultural liberals, libertarians, and liberal conservatives, act according to the EMA principle, and are thus acting as truly liberal, we will support them. Otherwise, we will not.

#### 4. Moral Libertarian Priorities for the Next Decade

In culture, we will uphold the freedom of speech and conscience for all. We will staunchly oppose any move towards so-called safe speech, and any attempts at no-platforming speakers, no matter what their political stance is. We will uphold freedom of religion for every individual, including the right to religious attire (opposing burka bans etc.), and the right to promote religious-based beliefs (e.g. the wide variety of religious views on abortion). We will also uphold the right of individuals to be entitled to express their sincerely held beliefs and truths, regardless of race, gender, gender identity or sexuality. Therefore, we support multicultural liberty (e.g. the choice of singing competition contestants to sing in a foreign language every week if they wish to), and we support LGBT liberty (e.g. the liberty of any gender expression without negative consequences from society). We will discourage everyone in society from taking cultural opinion personally or adopting a victim mentality, because this will be bad for rational discourse in the free market of ideas.

In politics, we will advocate for the removal of state-sanctioned privileges on both grounds of individual privilege and cultural value privilege, including unequal marriage laws and adoption laws, and work regulations that unfairly impact religious minorities, for example. We will also advocate for strong action to protect the sanctity of free speech and the prevention of so-called safe speech and no-platforming from becoming the new norm.